Weighty apples: Josephine and Chester "Sam" Siudzinski brace an apple tree growing in their yard. The couple's large garden yields a variety of fruits and vegetables each year for canning.

Cows are king in this community

By Lisa Sumter
Press-Gazette

PINE GROVE — Cows far outnumber people in this Brown County community, which boasts one of the largest dairy farms in Northeastern Wisconsin.

Pine Grove, about six miles southeast of Green Bay, also is home to retirees and workers who commute to Green Bay. No businesses are here, but there is an active Catholic church. Home construction is cropping up as growth from nearby Bellevue spills into Pine Grove.

One major contributor to the lopsided bovine-to-human ratio is the Stencil farm, 4819 Glen View Road. Robert Stencil and his sons, Jerry and Dave, have 700 cows.

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

Jerry Stencil is modest about his family's success. His philosophy: work hard, work smart and help yourself.

"Whether or not you're turning a profit, you still show up to work," he says. "If you get in trouble, you get down behind the wheel and push a little harder and maybe you can get over the hill.

The Rev. Ralph Merkatoris has been the pastor at Holy Trinity Church, 4767 Stage Coach Road, since 1969. He says the parish no longer is strictly a Polish, farm parish. There is an ethnic mix now in the community. Many smaller farms were swallowed by bigger operations or displaced by construction of Interstate 43 in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

But the church thrives. The parish grew from 650 in 1976 to its current membership of 1,650.

"There's not much left of Pine Grove anymore," Merkatoris says. "It's the people and the church that make the difference today."

Joe and Betty Pieschek, 4716 Brown County NN, have lived here for 18 years, operating a small dairy farm. With no outside help, the farm work is left to the family — including Jenny, 18, Becky, 14, Jared, 12 and Brenda, 6.

"We always say, if everybody pitches in it goes a lot faster," Betty says.

Chester "Sam" Siudzinski, 73, is a lifelong resident of Pine Grove. He and his wife, Josephine, 4820 Brown County NN, sold all but one acre of their farm before I-43 plowed through the area.

"I've got a big monument there — the overpass goes right over where the house was," he says.

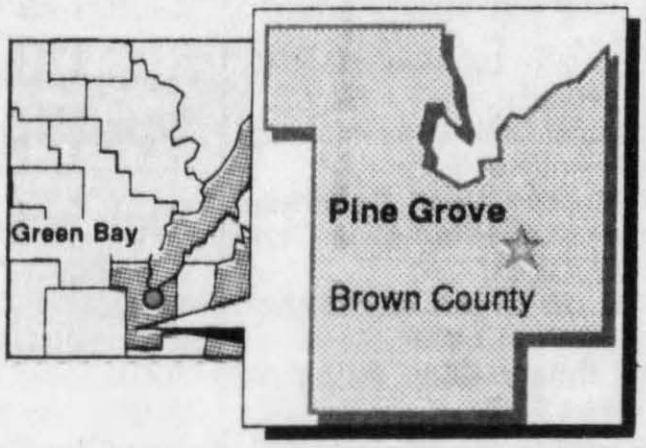
Little is left in Pine Grove to remind residents of the old days. A ¾-acre stand of virgin white pine trees, for which the community was named, is gone.

Gladys Jensen, 83, 4475 Main St., was one of two teachers from 1928-31 at the now vacant Pine Grove School. Her father started Lawrence Jensen Merchandise, a general store and post office.

The Jensens ran a small farm and Gladys's mother, Eva, was the telephone operator at the store.

"My father milked seven cows and that was the money I used to go to school," Jensen says. "For each outside call my mother got 10 cents and she saved enough money from those calls to buy a horse."

■ **Next week:** Hickory Corners in Oconto County.



Pine Grove file

☐ **Population:** about 45.

☐ **Crossroads:** Pine Grove marks the intersection of four Brown County towns — Glenmore, De Pere, Eaton and New Denmark.

☐ **Budget crunch:** The state did not provide funds in 1930 when it mandated that Pine Grove School start a hot lunch program. So parents sent supplies including dried peas, milk, onions, rice, even an oil stove. About $10 in school funds were spent during the year to prepare the lunches, former teacher Gladys Jensen says.

☐ **Historical perspective:** Settlement in Pine Grove started in the early 1800s when logging was the main business. Much of the timber was lost to fire in the 1870s.

Farm family: Left photo, from left, Betty and Joe Pieschek and children Brenda, 6, Jared, 12, and Becky, 14, find room on a tractor at their farm. At right, Rev. Ralph Merkatoris and Gladys Jensen talk outside the former Lawrence Jensen Merchandise store, which was owned by her father, L.N. Jensen.